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THOUGHTS ON ACQUISITIONS

The theme of this FLYLEAF, advice and instructions on ordering books for the Library, is primarily addressed to the faculty section of the Friends; but the other Friends may enjoy reading about the ordering process, and some of the sage counsel herein contained may be of practical benefit to them.

Some of the Friends may remember an article on the subject by Professor and Librarian Bill Dix, a little classic which appeared in the December 15, 1950 issue of the Fondren Library Bulletin. It is here reprinted with the Editor's hope that others will enjoy its wit and imagination as much as he does.

How to Order a Book

There are many ways to recommend a book for purchase by the Fondren Library, and they meet with varying degrees of success. Joseph Q. Finletter, professor of Stabilized Aramaic Literature, usually stops me at the Faculty Club just as we finish lunch and I am on my way to the billiard room. "Oh, there, Dix," says the good old man, "there's a new book by Ranganthian, published in Bombay, that we ought to have." His duty done, the good old gentleman trots happily off to his research, we both forget the whole thing, the book goes out of print, and five years later Finletter's graduate students wonder why we don't have one of the definitive works on Old High Aramaic.

Mortimer Trivet, the young and energetic Instructor in Sedentary Agronomy, is more systematic. He strides into my office on June 3, throws down a sheaf of neatly typed lists and says proudly, "I didn't want to get caught without funds in my allocation, so I've been studying the second-hand catalogs all year just like you suggested. I've thrown away the catalogs, but here are the titles and even the names of the authors of about three hundred books that the Library should pick up."

Trivet goes home to pack for a trip to Mexico, confident that he has done his duty to the Institute, blissfully unaware that even if we can identify the books without more data, even if the Order Department can check three hundred titles in a few hours, we had just as well not order the books unless our order is mailed within forty-eight hours after receiving a dealer's catalogue. Some Eastern library has young Trivet's books before we get his list, and Trivet and the Library staff have wasted a surprising number of hours.

Amos Entwhistle, Lecturer in Sumerian History, regularly turns in neat order cards for titles which he has run across in his reading. Unfortunately, half of these titles are unverifiable, and the Order Department has a sneaking suspicion that they are really titles of journal articles and not books at all.

On the other hand, Mort Schlafen, Chairman of the Department of Applied Celestial Mechanics, causes the staff no trouble at all; he neither recommends books nor delegates the responsiblity for the collections in his field to the young men in his department. The Fondren Library collections in Applied Celestial Mechanics are the weakest in any library between El Paso and Orange, but Professor Schlafen will never know it; he visits the Library only to buy cigarettes.

Of these four ways to order books Schlafen's is obviously the worst, but they are all bad. There is a right way, and it is used by many faculty members. They consider it their business to catch all significant new books and journals in their fields, they read the dealer's catalogs promptly, they check the library's card catalog to avoid duplication, they turn in legible and complete order cards clipped to publishers' announcements or dealers' catalogs. As a result we are able to get their orders off quickly and economically and to report to them promptly on every recommendation. They get more books more quickly. Their collections are beautiful to behold, and their names shall be called blessed.

William S. Dix

Since Dr. Dix wrote those lines almost twenty years ago, almost everything connected with the Rice Library has grown in size and complexity: staff, budget, faculty, collection, procedures. Nevertheless nothing has rendered obsolete his main points, which remain for everyone to read.

At present, comparatively few faculty members make direct deals with the librarian, and systems of departmental book committees and departmental library representatives have grown up. But, however it is done, an order slip should still be presented to the Order section of the Acquisitions department, so that the checking and ordering process can go forward. Recently issued instructions for this are as follows:

"How to place an order: After a preliminary check in the card catalog indicates the item is not in the Library, request slips are filled out (typed, if possible) by members of the faculty or by secretaries or graduate students delegated for this task. It is important that these slips be legible in order to eliminate possible errors in handling the requests. The following information is needed on the book request form:

1. Author (full name; surname first)
2. Title (complete as possible)
3. Place (of publication)
4. Publisher
5. Date published
6. Edition (second or later edition, revised edition, reprint, etc.)
7. Estimated price (the publisher's or dealer's listed price)
8. Recommended by (person ordering the book, countersigned by the faculty representative responsible for the departmental book budget)

9. Offered by (name of the dealer, number of his catalog or list, item number in the catalog)
10. Fund (the departmental charge)
11. Source (bibliographical reference or other listing)"

To put down this detail may seem tedious or even unnecessary, but a first-class collection cannot be built from slipshod methods and faulty information. The whole cataloging process begins with the order slip, and the checking and revising which necessarily follow will eventually produce a good and trustworthy catalog.

To avoid the tedium of filling out order slips, some departments put their students (graduate and undergraduate) to work in checking bibliographies against the card catalog, as well as in following through on the dealers' catalogs which faculty members have marked.

Although theoretically the Library could do this work, if more funds were available to hire extra personnel, much would be lost if the Library did it all; the students receive instruction from the assistant head of the Order division and learn invaluable skills in bibliography while they are carrying out their departmental duties. In the absence of any general university instruction in library use, these students are fortunate in being selected to learn so much about books.

Actually, ordering a book is easier now than it used to be, because the Library has standing order arrangements with some thirty university presses to presses to receive all their publications, or at least all in those fields which have been designated by the Rice departments of instruction. In the fields of engineering, there are blanket orders for all univer-

sity-level publications from twenty-five trade publishers.

Students and Friends are invited to submit book requests, and forms are provided for this purpose. It is of course hoped that Friends will give books, or more simply, the money with which to buy books, but the Fondren is sincere in its wish to serve its Friends if it can.

Care should be taken when proposing to give a book or a set of books, to see that the Library really needs them and does not have them already. On several regrettable occasions, considerable sums of money have been at least partially wasted because it was assumed that the Fondren did not have the work in question when in fact it did.

Duplicates are often desirable, but not always, and one reason why the Fondren is so good for its size is that the librarians in its formative years set their faces against unnecessary duplication.

In the case of the gift of a general collection or a personal library which comes to the Gifts and Exchanges division, the above-mentioned caution does not apply, because those volumes which are needed can be added to the main collection and the others sold or given to one of the college or departmental reading rooms around the campus. These campus collections, which add a great deal to the total strength of the Rice Library holdings, but do not have the disadvantages attendant upon conventional departmental libraries, will be discussed in a future issue of the FLYLEAF.

H. C.

THE MUIR PAPERS

The papers of the late Andrew Forest Muir (1916-1968) have been presented to the Rice Library.

Professor Muir, who occupied a number of academic posts with distinction and was Professor of History in Rice University at the time of his death, was a widely respected student of the social, economic, and political history of Texas, particularly the period of the Republic. In addition, he was an authority on the development of the Anglican-Protestant Episcopal Church in the Hawaiian Islands, but his papers in this field have been given to the University of Hawaii. Professor Muir's papers consist of photostats, typescript and holographic notes, maps, extensive newspaper clippings--especially on the history of Houston-photographs, original documents, and the like. In addition, the Muir papers contain personal correspondence between Muir and such eminent Texas historians as Walter Prescott Webb and J. Frank Dobie, as well as that with publishers, his departmental colleagues, students, and persons in England and America who were aware of his knowledge and wished to benefit from it.

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